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ABSTRACT

Lesley College and the public schools in Cambridge, Massachusetts collaborated in a project using the natural learning model from Don Holdaway's "The Foundations of Literacy" to improve literacy education in grades K-6. The first two phases of natural learning (desire to learn a skill and attempting the new skill with a proficient person) were covered by a "sharing" time, in which the teacher as demonstrator would read enlarged text to children and point to words. The third and fourth phases (practicing and then performing the new skill) corresponded with the "doing" time, in which children could choose from among several expressive activities including computer work, drama, reading silently, or art. Evaluation of students' progress was guided by the principles that evaluation should be integral to in-class work; should emphasize change and progress over achievement; should use methods consonant with the ultimate purposes of reading for meaning and writing for communication; and should assist a child's learning by describing but not judging it. Three instruments--Marie Clay's "Concepts about Print," oral reading tapes, and a visual cue writing sample--were used for the nearly 300 students participating in the project. Results indicated that the children have become true readers and not decoders. (Three graphs are included.) (MHC)

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THE CAMBRIDGE-LESLEY LITERACY PROJECT:
Theory, Practice and Evaluation

Introduction

Part I: Theory

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Part II: Practice

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Part III: Evaluation

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Talks given at the National Conference,
National Association of Teachers of English
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The Cambridge Lesley Literacy Project: Theory, Practice and Evaluation

Introduction

I want to begin this paper by acknowledging how deeply we at the Cambridge Lesley Literacy Project are indebted to the work of Don Holdaway, on whose thought it is based, who was with us at its inception in the fall of 1983, and who guided our development until November 1986, when he returned to Australia. Indeed, he is still an integral part of the project, an Adjunct Professor at Lesley College and consultant to the Cambridge School Department.

The roots of the project actually reach back to 1975, when a new superintendent of schools looking over the system, questioned the high percentages of "learning disabled" children, in some schools in ethnic and poorer neighborhoods of the city running as high as 30%-40%. He suggested that instead of intervening in the lives of so many children, we might think of intervening in the system itself. The so-called K-3 Model was developed, to give special time to at risk children within the classroom with a rich language and literature base.

This program was largely successful in the prevention of failure. It had been instituted in five of the city's thirteen schools, and in those schools, failure had been reduced to between 5% and 10%. At this point, an opportunity arose to secure the services of Don Holdaway, whose book, The Foundations of Literacy had deeply influenced teachers working within the model. I was one of those teachers at that time, and I vividly remember staying up most of the night reading it, and how elated I was. I felt that it provided the theoretical base for all that we were groping towards.

An integral part of Holdaway's proposal for a demonstration developmental literacy learning project had to do with the close collaboration of a university and a school system. The dynamism resulting from such a collaboration had sparked the New Zealand experience, of which he, with Marie Clay and other talented people, had been leaders. They took seriously the research, much of which had been done in the U.S., in children's natural first language learning, and they wondered if that powerful developmental drive for language learning might not be applied to literacy learning as well. They turned their attention to pre-school children's experience with favorite books and began to see the important contribution that early experience with books can make to entrance into literacy. I am not going to describe in any detail the research in emergent literacy as the foundation on which later success is built, nor the history of the highly successful experiment in applying the whole set of ideas deriving from it to a pilot school in New Zealand, and its subsequent adoption and implementation as a national model, because I am assuming that this audience is familiar with that story which is chronicled in The Foundations of Literacy. I do want to comment on the model of collaboration that Lesley College and the Cambridge Schools, following the New Zealand experience, entered into. It was not a we-they thing. Together we developed the model. Cambridge teachers soon knew more about it than anyone else. Together we developed institutes and inservice courses. Together we presented and demonstrated and began to document and track children's progress. It was the responsibility of Lesley College to devise a design for evaluation, which Brenda Engel will describe. The evaluation has also become a collaborative venture. We feel as if we too have experienced that dynamism engendered by true collaboration, just as it happened in Auckland. Teacher-researcher benefits go both ways, and it has been an enlivening experience for us all.

Part I : THEORY

I am assuming that this audience is familiar with the whole complex set of understandings which underly the psycholinguistic model of reading, the research in early writing and writing process, and a whole body of knowledge about human being's acquisition of literacy which has become available to us in the very recent past. Jerome Harste speaking recently at a conference in Rhode Island remarked that 90% of all that we know about the acquisition of language and literacy has derived from research within the last twenty-five years, and that the major researchers are all alive today. There has been a veritable explosion of knowledge, all of which has vast implications for classroom practice. The Cambridge Lesley Literacy Project is rooted in the insights coming from this new paradigm.

However, as I tried to imagine what might be the single most shaping and original contribution that we might be able to make today, I found myself returning again and again to the natural learning model as applied to literacy learning, of which Holdaway has written in his chapter in The Pursuit of Literacy, edited by Michael Sampson, Kendall/Hunt, because it is on this model that the practice of the Cambridge Lesley Literacy Project is built.

By the natural learning model, I refer to all kinds of natural learning that human beings engage in throughout their lives, from learning to walk, talk, ride a bike, swim, ski, drive a car, cook Chinese style, or to operate a word processor.

As Don Holdaway has described natural developmental learning, there are four distinct phases.

The first condition for learning is that the new learner sees someone, preferably someone whom he admires, doing something for that person's own purposes, and he decides he would like to learn to do whatever it is himself. The first phase of learning happens in the head of the learner as a result of a demonstration by a skilled person, before there is any outward indication of the learner's resolve at all.

The second phase of the learning begins when the learner makes that desire known to the skilled person, and the skilled person invites the new learner into the process in a supportive and guiding way. An example might be a young child's desire to help his mother cook pancakes. Together they measure out the ingredients and carefully dump them into the bowl. Her hand and his wield the big spoon, and together they scoop out a dollop of batter and drip it on the griddle, having first made sure that the temperature was just right by flicking a few drops of water on it, all the while talking to each other informally. Holdaway calls this phase of learning participation. During this phase, the new learner is role playing himself into the skill. It is characterized by clumsy approximations. New learners are never skillful at the start, at least I don't know of any. And the role of the skilled person is encouraging and non-judgmental.

The third phase of the learning begins as the new learner gets a new sort of inner feeling. He decides he wants to take the learning into his own hands. He knows somehow what is necessary - he needs to get on his own and make that learning his own - he knows that he needs to enter a period of extensive practice. All of us have seen how purposeful is the practice of young children when they have decided to learn something new. A special characteristic of rapid and deep learning is that it is controlled by the learner. It is self-regulated. To carry on the illustration of the young flapjack cook, there comes a time when he tells his mother that he is going to make pancakes all by himself. If she is brave enough, she will withdraw, and although the mess may be extensive, great piles of pancakes are accumulated. The first set may be a near disaster, but if on Sunday nights, it becomes the prerogative of the young cook to make the pancakes, eventually the whole thing begins to go quite smoothly.

Now we are ready for the fourth phase. Triumph! Take a look at this! Who would like to eat some of my pancakes? Performance. Well on his way to becoming an accomplished cook, the new learner is ready to invite everyone to enjoy the fruits of his labor, and to show off his newly acquired skill to anyone who will be his audience. The performance phase of the learning completes the cycle, and a deeply confident young learner enthusiastically wants the world to know about it.

The more usual examples, of course, come from first language learning. A useful distinction has been made by James Gee in his paper, What Is Literacy? delivered at the Mailman Foundation Conference on Families and Literacy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in March, 1987. He makes the case that literacy, like first language learning and many other skills, is acquisitional learning. We learn by immersing ourselves in the process. We can also learn about language, in order to become a psycholinguist, for instance, and in that case we learn about all the governing principles and rules. Gee sees literacy learning as acquisitional. Perhaps we have made learning to read and write more difficult by approaching them in the learning about mode, as Frank Smith illustrates in his famous essay, Twelve Easy Ways to Make Learning to Read Difficult.

If this analysis of natural learning has rung true and Holdaway is right that it does contain these four distinct aspects or phases, which of course do not divide themselves as neatly and distinctly as my description would indicate, then it follows that we should give careful thought to the kinds of school environments in which learning may take place, and to the kinds of roles in which teachers and children may engage. The next paper will describe how this is realized in the Cambridge Lesley Literacy Center at the Longfellow School.

Part II: Description of Practice

The pilot site of the Cambridge-Lesley Literacy Project is at the Longfellow School in Cambridge. Its special environment, called the Literacy Center, is print-saturated and set up with child-centered areas that invite self-regulation and independent learning. It is a joyous place to visit. The entire primary team at the Longfellow School was integral to the development of the project and its concurrent integration into the daily curriculum of the Pre-K through Grade 3 classrooms (including the Hispanic Bilingual Program). The Project also exemplifies a stable and congenial collaboration between a public school system and an institution of higher education, Lesley College. Since its pilot year, the Project has expanded, with a variety of formats, to eight other schools within the city.

Eleven classes participate in the program. It is entirely voluntary, yet all of the teachers have chosen to participate. The teachers have a minimum of two "sharings" per week (about 30-45 minutes in length). many of the teachers have the "sharing" and follow-up "doing" activities every day. Some do it in lieu of another reading-writing program, and some coordinate it or balance it with a basal program.

During the "sharing," the teacher reads 4-6 pieces of "predictable" text. The print is enlarged, and the teacher points to the words with a pointer. These techniques help the

children focus on print details, make sound-symbol correspondence and learn about directionality of print and its conventions.

A recommended sequence might be:

a) Warm-up: This help "tune in" the children. It is often short, fast-paced, a poem, chant or song.

b) Old favorite: This is often a "read-it-again" choice. Here is an excellent time to teach skills and strategies in context.

c) New text: Introduction of a new story or stories. May be thematic or curriculum oriented. For example, it may tie in with a social studies unit on sibling rivalry, or a science unit about the ocean. These texts become the old favorites of the future "shared reading" sessions.

d) Cool down: This is a final text to close out the session. It is often calming, soothing, to settle the children.

This "sharing" time, once again, is about 30-40 minutes in length. Here the teacher is the "demonstrator" or "enabler." It corresponds with the first two phases of Holdaway's "natural phases of developmental learning."

After the "sharing," it's time for the "doing." These child-

centered activities take place twice a week in the Literacy Center, or may continue in the classroom if it isn't the regularly scheduled time for the children to visit the Center.

It is important here to emphasize the the way the "doing" phase is carried out varies from teacher to teacher. Each individual has embraced Holdaway's philosophy and interpreted it to meet his or her own needs and styles of teaching. Usually, though, the teacher suggests choices, allowing the children to respond to the stories and texts through a variety of expressive activities. These activities are self-regulated and not adult-oriented. The learner needs the time to role play "literacy activities" on his or her own. This "doing" time corresponds to the third and fourth stages of Holdaway's "natural phases of literacy development." By offering a wide variety of activities, as open-ended as possible, all the children in a class will more likely become involved in responding to the literature that has been presented in the "sharing" phase. The teacher's role here is supportive. Some suggested activities might include: writing (text innovation, process writing), art (drawing, painting, construction), computer (word processor, graphics), drama (dramatization of favorite texts, text innovations, original plays), listening station (multiple copies of predictable texts, old favorites, may be commercial or "home-made" tapes, some may emphasize oral and written cloze activities), personal reading (children may wish to read independently in a quiet area, or with a friend or teacher; younger children often role-play reading

with a big book, pointer and easel).

Part III: Evaluation

I want to begin with a statement of four principles of evaluation which have guided and informed both our processes and methods:

1. Evaluation should be immediately useful, "built-into" teaching and integral to the day-by-day in-class work. The insights gained from ongoing evaluation of individual children and groups should act as instant feedback for teachers, informing methods, timing, activities and, to some extent, curriculum. [For purposes of setting local or national policy, a system of statistical sampling should be adequate.]

2. Reasonable evaluation should emphasize change and progress over achievement. It is progress towards competence which has meaning for the individual, not a particular level of achievement at a particular time.

3. Evaluation methods should be consonant with the ultimate purpose of the activity, that purpose kept intact, kept in mind: that is, reading for meaning and writing for communication. In school, we often begin to see achieving high test scores as the purpose of reading and good form---spelling and punctuation---as the purpose of writing. I want to emphasize here that the purpose of teaching reading has to be the same as the purpose of reading, the purpose of

teaching writing the same as the purpose of writing.

4. We also believe that the primary function of evaluation is to "keep track" in order to assist the child's learning-- which means emphasizing description (of change and progress) over judgment; in other words, support and affirmation rather than confrontation and threat. Too much of the time evaluation becomes a dreaded challenge to the child rather than an affirmation of learning.

There are many other beliefs which informed the evaluation study, some of them implicit in the two talks which preceded mine, others which you can deduce from our whole presentation. I want to describe now specifically what we've been doing.

It should be understood that the work I'm about to describe is distinctly "work-in-progress;" that is, not only are the methods themselves still under revision but the whole undertaking is meant to change its structure as it moves gradually from being a college-school collaboration to ownership by teachers. Teachers at the Longfellow School have already taken on a good deal of responsibility for the assessment procedures and our hope is that eventually teachers will modify and adapt these procedures for regular classroom use.

I also want to acknowledge, at this point, our heavy debt to Marie Clay, Don Holdaway, Patricia Carini and Donald Graves whose

ideas particularly inform our methods. Some of the instruments we used were directly suggested by the work of these educators, some were taken or adapted from published methods.

The evaluation study began in the academic year, 1984-85 and is thus now in its fourth year. We recently received a grant from General Cinema Corporation which enables us to carry on the work this year and for another 2 years---it's particularly gratifying in this setting, so close to Hollywood, to be able to acknowledge this one connection between movies and literacy learning.

The first year we tested children in grades K-3-- that is, all those participating in the Literacy Project in the Longfellow School. We continued to follow these children, adding entering K children each year until this year when we will be looking at children in K-6, a total of almost 300. About a third of these are in bilingual-- in Spanish-- classes.

Now for the instruments: each year we administered Marie Clay's Concepts about Print individually to children in kindergarten and first grade. The test comes with a small booklet, Stones (or, alternatively, Sand) which the tester reads to/with the child. For this test, the tester sits down with the child and hands him/her the booklet. The tester begins by saying, "I'm going to read this book with you. Can you show me where the front is? OK, now you can open it to the first page. Put your finger on where I should begin reading. Where do I go now? Can you follow along

with your finger?" As the tester goes through the booklet, she asks questions about directions, voice-print matching, about what a word or letter is, the meaning of some punctuation marks, and so on. There are a total of 24 questions. The child is scored on the number answered correctly.

This test is a useful indicator of children's knowledge of the conventions of the print system and how that knowledge changes during the first year of schooling. It is not a "readiness" test, nor does it reveal children's knowledge of reading in the larger-- and perhaps more significant--- sense: that is, their appreciation of literary forms and language. It takes about ten minutes to administer and score simultaneously.

The results, according to last spring's report, were the following: There was a great variation in kindergarten scores, from 5 to 20 out of a possible 24. The girls answered an average of one more questions than the boys. The class average was 13.2--- in the general range we've found every year.

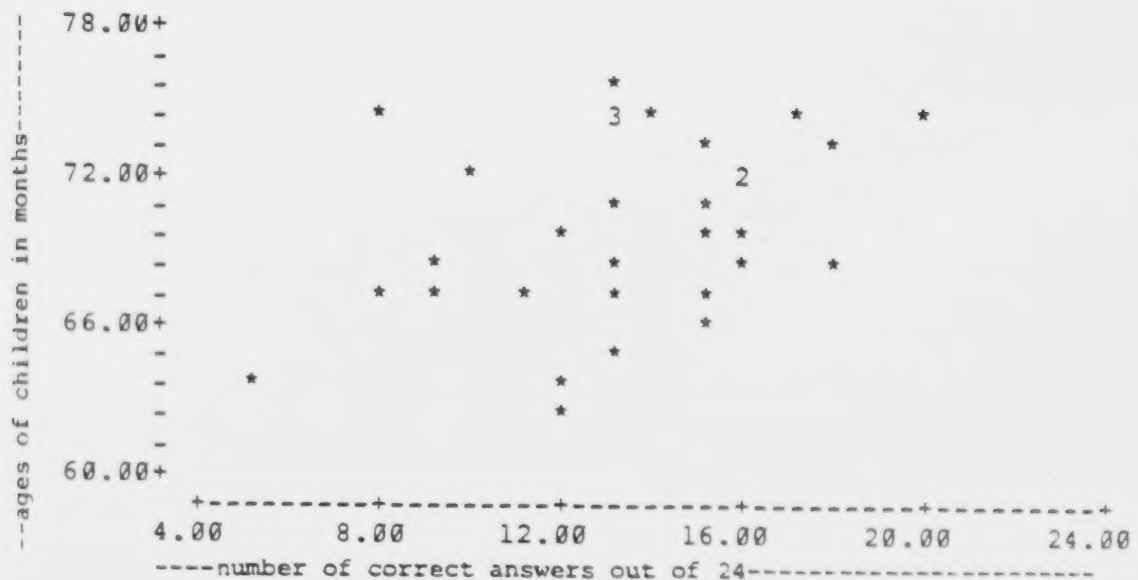
First graders made an average gain of 6.5 responses from the test the previous year, from 12 to 18.5. The 21 children who had been in the class the previous year averaged a point higher than the 12 new children.

Following is a scatterplot of the results of the rest, spring, 1987. The children's ages in months go up the left side, their

scores (out of a possible 24) are across the bottom. The numbers represent the number of scores which happened to fall at that particular location.

Kindergarten

Scatterplot: scores in Concepts about
Print vs. ages of children in months



Oral Reading: we taped oral reading samples with all children, first grade and up, then scored the tapes by a modified miscue analysis. For this instrument, the tester takes the child to a secluded place, asking him/her to bring along a favorite book to read. The child then reads the book for about 5-10 minutes-- which is often long enough to finish it. The tester then plays back for the child a bit of the previous year's oral reading so the child has some confirming sense of progress. [The children invariably recognize their own voices and often make remarks like "I can read much better than that now!"] The tester then sets the tape for this year's reading and offers the child a choice of 2 or 3 new stories, judged to be about on the right level, to read aloud into the tape recorder.

The selections offered are from Networks Evaluation Resource Book published by Nelson, Canada. Each story, although not long, has a shape and a point to make. If, in the first few paragraphs or so, the text seems too hard--- that is, the child is missing more than one out of 20 words---the tester suggests it might be better to go to a less difficult story. If it seems too easy and the child is virtually breezing through, a more difficult story is suggested. The tester restrains herself from helping or supplying words, at the most suggesting the child go back a bit and try that sentence again. At the end of the reading, the child is asked to retell the story.

The readings can take up to a half hour. The scoring, which is

done later, takes about the same amount of time-- so we estimate a total of one hour per child for this test.

Each tape is scored in five ways. First, for literal accuracy.: researchers like Marie Clay have demonstrated that if a child misses more than an average of 1 out of 20 words, he/she is likely not to fully understand the text and at the same time lost confidence and momentum. This accuracy percentage thus establishes a kind of ground for the other scores. It has no significance in itself except as a minimum requirement. If the % of accuracy turns out to be less than 95, in many cases we retest.

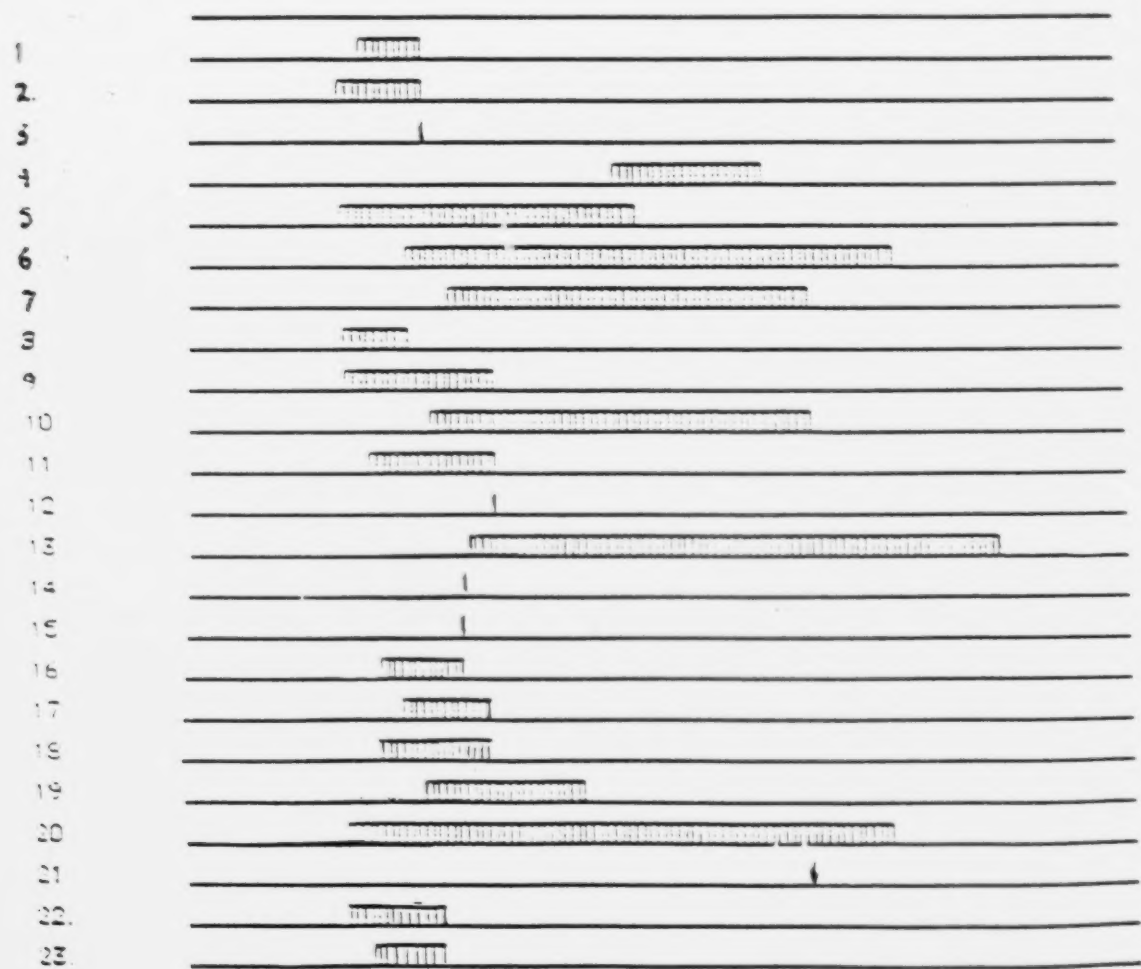
I said earlier, this is a "modified miscue" method. A second score then represents the percentage of meaningful miscues out of the total number of miscues. A miscue is a literal error. A meaningful miscue is when an adequate word is substituted for the one on the page (home, for instance, for house) or a miscue is self-corrected. A third score represents the percentage of self-corrections out of the total number of miscues. A fourth score is the rating given to the retelling (1, 2 3 or 4 going from poor to complete) and, finally, the level of the text. (The text levels are assigned by the publisher and don't represent grade levels; there are several levels considered roughly appropriate for each grade.)

We have changed the scoring somewhat from the published version and have also substituted a different set of stories for the

Spanish-speaking children. You can see that the emphasis here is very much on meaning, on meaning based on a whole text.

The following two diagrams are based on the text levels read and represent the results of the oral reading samples for a second

Levels assigned to Nelson Language Development Reading
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 Test
 gr. 1 gr. 2 gr. 3 gr. 4 gr. 5 gr. 6



Note: Vertically barred lines (|||||) go from test level in spring, 1986, to test level in spring, 1987. Thus one year of progress is illustrated from each child. A single vertical line indicates test level, 1987, for children not previously tested.

Levels assigned to Nelson Language Development Reading Test:

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22
 gr. 1 gr. 2 gr. 3 gr. 4 gr. 5 gr. 6



Note: parallel horizontal lines (====) go from test level in spring, 1985, to test level in spring, 1986. Vertically barred lines (|||||) go from test level in spring, 1986, to test level in spring, 1987. Thus two years of progress are illustrated from each child.

It is important to understand that these levels already assume high literal accuracy and comprehension of the text. If it were just a matter of decoding, each child might have been assigned a higher text level. You can see that the children began to read, in first grade, at different levels and the amount of change and progress among them varies dramatically. On the diagram of the fifth grade, it appears that less progress has been made because there are fewer text levels assigned to each grade above grade 3. It is evident, however, that all the fifth graders are readers although #8 might need extra attention and experience.

The third and last method I want to describe is a Visual Cue Writing Sample. The writing is done in class, under the supervision of the teacher. We have over a dozen photographs--- of illustrations from a book unfamiliar to the children. The photographs are spread out on a table and the children are asked to pick one about which to write a story. "Write the best story you can. Spelling doesn't count." The stories are collected and later wholistically scored by a team of 2 or 3 persons.

We first do a word and sentence count, then calculate words-per-sentence. We assign a score for richness of content and, finally, for form.

The content scale was derived from a diagnostic probe of children's writing widely used in clinical settings, called the Myklebust Picture Story Language Test. The score is based on a

continuum from bare-bones literalness to imaginative stories with feeling and style. A low might be given to a story like: "A house a man a cat" or "I see a dog." A high score given for a story that begins, "Once upon a time there was a boy named Jeremy. He was in the first grade and was vey very funny. He pretended he was going to Gwam and when he got there he kept hearing echoes...."

We're in the process, currently, of further elaborating and refining our assessment of form.

Now, in addition to these three instruments designed to assess reading and writing, I should mention another important, perhaps the most important, element of the evaluation study at the Longfellow School: child studies. We selected two children from each grade level, adding 2 K children each year. For these children, in addition to administering the more formal tests, we've established an ongoing collection of artwork and writing samples along with in-school observations. These collections give us an opportunity to take a deeper and broader look at how children become literate: we can identify the themes which recur in the imagination, the role of friendship in supporting literacy, favorite modes of expression and communication, strengths and interests, and so on. We hope eventually these studies will give us a significant view of the program's effect on these young readers and writers.

We have also done some teacher interviews and, one year, an assessment of children's familiarity with literature, neither of which I want to discuss now because of time constraints.

I'm going to end with a paraphrase and a quotation. The paraphrase is of a statement about standardized testing, made by Edward Chittenden, from Educational Testing Service, at a recent conference. He said something like this: looking to improvement in standardized tests for better ways to assess learning is like attempting to design a better device for measuring rainfall in order to more accurately predict the weather.

The quotation is from an article by Sheila Valencia and David Pearson in the April, 1987, issue of The Reading Teacher: "What we must do... is .. help educators and policymakers at all levels begin to think about assessment strategies that are consistent with strategic reading and that redefine the instruction/assessment link. What we need are not just new and better tests. We need a new framework for thinking about assessment." It was wonderful seeing that statement in the journal because those were certainly our aims when we designed the assessment methods for the Cambridge-Lesley Literacy Project at the Longfellow School: identify assessment strategies that are consistent with the theory and practice of developmental reading and redefine the instruction/assessment link.

I want to respond now to one not-yet-asked question, how do these

children do on standardized tests? They seem to be doing all right although we don't have enough data yet to make definitive statements. We can say, however, that we're more interested in what kinds of readers these children are, whether they're bent on getting meaning from print, whether they see reading both in and out of school, as a personal possibility, whether they see themselves as competent readers. These are the questions behind our evaluation study. From our evidence so far, we believe the children in the program are becoming readers in the true sense of the word, not merely decoders, and, if standardized tests do anything like an accurate job of assessing literacy, these children should knock them over.